

29. THE HOUSE SPARROW *PASSER DOMESTICUS* (LINN.) AS  
A PREDATOR OF THE PEACH LEAF CURL APHID  
*BRACHYCAUDUS HELICHRYSI* (KALTENBACH)

Four peach (*Prunus persica* Batch cv. *Flordasun*) trees planted during January 1978 were present in the compound of one of the houses of the Aggar Nagar residential locality of Ludhiana and were severely infested by peach leaf curl aphid *Brachycaudus helichrysi* (Kaltenbach) and peach mealy aphid, *Hyalopterus pruni* (Geoffrey) every year. In March 1984, house sparrows *Passer domesticus* (Linn.) were seen pecking at the curled leaves of peaches and it was seen that they were feeding on the peach leaf curl aphid. On March 12, 1984, 2, 3 and 3 sparrows were found feeding on these aphids, when the trees were observed at 10.00, 11.00 and 14.30 hrs respectively and again on March 20, 8-10 sparrows were seen feeding on the aphids at 10.20 hr. On April 3, sparrows were again observed to be feeding on the aphid.

In 1985, the curled leaves were observed on February 13 and 2-3 house sparrows per tree were observed on February 16, 1985, feeding on the aphids from the curled leaves. The number of sparrows feeding on this aphid increased as the number of aphid infested shoots increased. On February 28, 1985, minimum 2-3 sparrows were seen feeding on the aphids during the day, whenever the trees were observed.

*Feeding behaviour of the sparrows:*

The sparrows feed on the aphid colonies sitting on the shoots and eating the aphid by pecking them from the lower side of the leaf about a  $\frac{3}{4}$  from top of the shoot or from the curled parts. The sparrows also sit on the adjoining branches and ate the leaf curl aphid from the infested shoots near the branches on which, they sit. In some cases, they caught the growing shoots with their claws and ate the aphid present on the growing shoot.

In all these observations, house sparrows had concentrated their activity in predated the leaf curl aphid and the mealy aphid was spared, this may be due to the more handy location of the leaf-curl aphid (only shoots) as compared to mealy aphid which preferred the leaves of all ages.

In conclusion, house sparrows had a definite liking for peach leaf curl aphid atleast in residential localities and its role in leaf curl aphid regulation may be further investigated.

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